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DECENTRALIZATION, WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO TURN UP.

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PROPOSALS BY THE NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION ARE REVIEWED. PROPELLED BY THE BOYCOTT OF I.S. 201, THE BOARD ULTIMATELY DEVELOPED SEVEN PROJECTS WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. THE PROPOSAL OFFERING THE GREATEST POSSIBILITY FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION WAS ONE WHICH SUGGESTED THE CREATION OF TWO EXPERIMENTAL UNITS COMPOSED OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ITS FEEDERS. ONE UNIT WAS TO BE ORGANIZED AROUND A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ON THE WEST SIDE OF MANHATTAN, AND THE OTHER UNIT WAS TO CONSIST OF I.S. 201 AND ITS THREE FEEDER SCHOOLS. BOTH PLANS COLLAPSED. OF THE SIX OTHER PROPOSALS, ONE FOR BROWNSVILLE IN BROOKLYN COULD NOT GAIN COMMUNITY SUPPORT, AND THE OTHERS WERE EITHER POSTPONED INDEFINITELY OR THE BOARD DID NOT DEVELOP A SPECIFIC PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THEM. FINALLY, A NEW DECENTRALIZATION SCHEME INVOLVING THREE NEW EXPERIMENTAL UNITS WAS ANNOUNCED FOR WHICH THE FORD FOUNDATION WOULD PROVIDE PLANNING GRANTS TO ENABLE EACH UNIT TO DEVELOP ITS OWN PROPOSALS FOR A GOVERNING BOARD. HOWEVER, IN THIS PLAN THE BOARD OF EDUCATION WOULD HAVE VETO POWER OVER THE PROPOSED LOCAL GOVERNING BOARD, ITS PROJECTED PROGRAMS, AND ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS. THE TEACHERS UNION AND THE COUNCIL OF SUPERVISORY ASSOCIATIONS HAVE EXPRESSED SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ELECTED LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS. OTHER ISSUES TO BE FACED INVOLVE POSSIBLE CONFLICTS WITH CERTAIN STATE EDUCATION LAWS AND DETERMINING WHETHER THE EXPERIMENTS IN DECENTRALIZATION ARE ADEQUATE AND "WISE." THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE CENTER FORUM," VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2. (NH)

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Decentralization: Waiting For Something To Turn Up

Vol. 2, No. 2 August 28, 1967

Decentralization probably became an imperative in New York at the moment parents in Harlem boycotted the opening of IS 201. Before that point, many observers feel decentralization could have been dealt with by the board within its own pace and concerns. After that point, the matter was drawn irrevocably into the political realm where the board's ability to exercise effective authority has become increasingly unsure. Since then a lot of proposals for decentralization have been suggested and experiments designed. What effect all of this will have on education over both the short- and long-term it is too early to say. This report is an attempt simply to place the effort thus far to decentralize in some perspective.

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The IS 201 boycott closed the school for a week during which time the professional bureaucracy of the school system acted only in reaction to crisis. It attempted to bail itself out by replacing the school's white principal with a Negro acting principal. The nominee, a woman, declined, refusing to be treated in any but a professional manner. Further, the teaching staff threatened to resign unless the principal's appointment was reaffirmed. When the board agreed to work toward a compromise solution—that is, opened the door for outside alternatives—it set in motion forces that are just beginning to make themselves felt. On October 20 and again on February 17, the board announced "a desire to experiment with varying forms of decentralization and community involvement." During the winter, it tried without success to get McGeorge Bundy, who had just become involvement, that the board saw as possible ways of achieving decentralization:

1. Division of a current school district into two smaller districts each with its own local school board and district superintendent.

2. Establishment within a school board area of a small grouping of schools, possibly including a high school and feeder intermediate and primary schools. Such a cluster could contract for special services as it needed them.

3. A demonstration district of small size with representatives of the community, parents, and staff, that sought to make more effective use of such people in the conduct of school programs. Such a demonstration could also experiment with new approaches to teacher training and curriculum development.

only one offered the prospect of passing on any real authority to the community.

This was the first project which called for the creation of two experimental school units, each consisting of a middle school and its feeders, under the supervision of an elected board. One of the units was to be in a socially and economically diverse urban renewal area on the upper West Side. The unit consisted of Joan of Arc Junior High School, and PS 75, 84, 163, and 179. The other unit consisted of IS 201, and PS 24, 39, and 68, in Harlem.

The boards for these units were to be designed in consultation with each school's parent association, teaching staff, and community representatives, and elected by the community. Each elected board then would select a unit administrator who had at least the equivalent of New York state certification for principal, and who would be

But even in this instance, in which authority was to be transferred to the local community, the transfer was qualified in important respects. The elected board was given little leeway in handling budget allocations and personnel. Textbooks, supplies, and maintenance funds would still be assigned to individual schools. Teacher assignments remained subject to agreements with the United Federation of Teachers and the Council of Supervisory Associations (principals and superintendents).

In less than a month IS 201 had fallen back into the same impasse between community and teachers that existed in September, and the Joan of Arc community showed itself to be hopelessly fragmented on the fundamental issues of the character of the elected board and on establishing criteria for community participation. Early in June one of the Joan of Arc feeders, PS 75 (which

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of the school system acted only in reaction to crisis. It attempted to bail itself out by replacing the school's white principal with a Negro acting principal. The nominee, a woman, declined, refusing to be treated in any but a professional manner. Further, the teaching staff threatened to resign unless the principal's appointment was reaffirmed. When the board agreed to work toward a compromise solution—that is, opened the door for outside alternatives—it set in motion forces that are just beginning to make themselves felt. On October 20 and again on February 17, the board announced "a desire to experiment with varying forms of decentralization and community involvement." During the winter, it tried without success to get McGeorge Bundy, who had just become president of the Ford Foundation, to head a task force panel that would suggest decentralization programs.

Throughout this period the board made no formal commitment to decentralization. At the end of March the state legislature, in response to Mayor Lindsay's request for more state aid for New York City schools, directed the mayor to submit a plan for decentralization by December 10, 1967. The next day the board distributed a 6,000 word policy statement about decentralization which it adopted some two weeks later at a public meeting. In all but 400 words of this statement the board spelled out decentralization in terms of the existing structure, practices, and personnel of the school hierarchy. The closing passage however, listed four kinds of experiments, all calling for community

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3. A demonstration district of small size with representatives of the community, parents, and staff, that sought to make more effective use of such people in the conduct of school programs. Such a demonstration could also experiment with new approaches to teacher training and curriculum development.

4. Several demonstrations in single schools to test parental and community involvement within a school's program.

The policy statement included the fact that the board "had requested the superintendent to formulate and present to it, as soon as possible, specific proposals."

The First Specific Proposal

In a press release dated April 20, the day after the board publicly accepted its statement, the board's information office made available the "*Proposals* recommended by Dr. Donovan and approved by the board to *explore specific areas* and procedures in encouraging community involvement in school affairs."

The proposals covered seven "decentralization" projects, but

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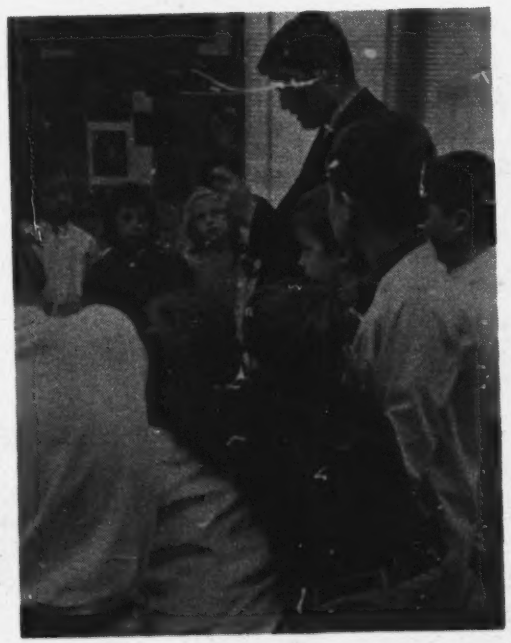

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Six Other Proposals

The second project suggested by Dr. Donovan called for establishing a smaller-than-usual school district in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn—12 schools and 25,000 pupils—simultaneously to relieve overcrowding in four adjacent districts and to see if the smaller district would permit greater community involvement. But the Board of Education, according to Robert Robinson, in charge of caretaking operations for all of the board's decentralization efforts, had dif-

ficulty gaining support for the project from the community. The Brownsville Community Council, the poverty agency in the area, complained that the project provided no real mechanisms for community involvement. It argued that the plan was imposed upon rather than drawn from the community. The plan called for the district superintendent and local school board to be selected and maintained in exactly the same way those in other districts are currently selected and maintained. According to Mr. Robinson, Dr. Donovan decided not to go ahead with the project for the time being.

The third project called essentially for the not-novel involvement of a university in guiding the educational program in four to six schools in the south and central Bronx. A governing board of parents, staff, and university faculty was suggested but not the mechanics of choosing the board or any indication that the board would be anything but advisory. The community would be involved to the extent that individuals would be trained for sub- and para-professional jobs. Mr. Robinson said the response from colleges and universities wanting

The fourth project was much like the third except it substituted private industry for the university, and it would test new technology in the classroom.

The fifth project, in the Parkchester section of the Bronx, a predominantly white neighborhood, called for a district superintendent's cabinet composed of the principals in the district plus parent and community representatives, including a representative of the area's poverty agency. The cabinet would be consultative, and draw its agenda from a chain of committees, parent and teacher thinking and organized at different levels of the district representing. Implementation of the project, Mr. Robinson said, was scheduled in the fall. Details are not available.

The sixth decentralization project suggested a rag-bag of individual demonstration projects in five schools: PS 36-125, 139-10, and 175 in Manhattan; PS 129 in Bedford-Stuyvesant; and PS 148, a new school in the Bronx. Each project would involve parents and teachers in planning, operating, and evaluating the school program, and outside experts to help; community residents could be hired and re-

munity disorganization.

The board's decentralization policy statement was followed within a few weeks by the halting or curtailing of a series of programs that had been designed to encourage desegregation and integration, namely open enrollment and the phasing out of vocational schools in favor of comprehensive high schools. Shortly thereafter the board went into contract negotiations with the UFT. The problem of planning for viable decentralization was put off for the fall.

The series of moves and countermoves set off a barrage of criticism which was summarized by the New York *Times* in an unusually forceful editorial on June 14. It described the city school system as "adrift on a sea of indecision" with "nobody keeping the vessel moving on a charted course."

It charged the board with indecision and with hastily announced reform plans whose only impetus was the pressure of crises, and said the plans "were readily abandoned" when the emergency seemed passed. "The school system cannot afford," the *Times* warned, "to mark time pending recommendations of the mayor's panel on decentralization."

and community residents in managing the schools." The experiment was the same suggested in the first project of the April proposal, but with crucial differences. First, and most importantly, the Ford Foundation was providing planning grants for each of the units. Secondly, three units were involved instead of two: IS 201—which had managed, at least temporarily, to solidify behind a planning proposal (the Joan of Arc community remained in profound disagreement); a highly-organized Lower East Side community, Two Bridges; and a Negro and Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Third, the requests for planning grants originated with the community. These requests spelled out in rough detail what the communities hoped to achieve. This last point separates the experiment from all others proposed. The board, it should be noted, retains the right to reject whatever proposals result from the planning grants.

That the board announced such an experiment seems to have astounded its intimates and critics alike. To understand the board's decision involves an understanding of the Ford Foundation's role in all of this.

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The seventh project proposed setting up a special unit to engage, according to Mr. Robinson, in a "dialogue" with Harlem. "Special unit" was not defined and as yet none exists.

Moves and Countermoves

Thus of the seven projects proposed, three made small pretense of being new, one has already been indefinitely postponed, two have yet to be provided with a plan, and the one that seemed significant dissipated itself because of com-

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Three weeks later, in early July, the board announced a *new* decentralization experiment: the creation of three independent multi-school units each governed by an elected board, run by unit administrators, and providing an unprecedented voice for parents, teachers, community residents in policy disagreement); a highly-organized Lower East Side community, Two Bridges; and a Negro and Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Third, the requests for planning grants originated with the community. These requests spelled out in rough detail what the communities hoped to achieve. This last point separates the experiment from all others proposed. The board, it should be noted, retains the right to reject whatever proposals result from the planning grants.

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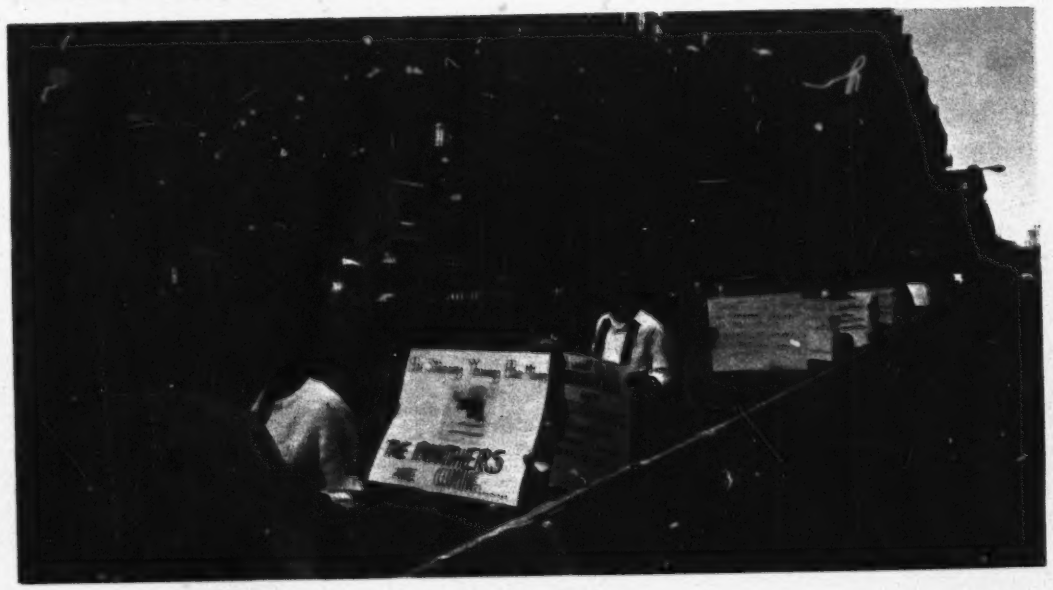
*The board announced at the same time an experiment to be conducted by Sol Gordon of Yeshiva University, which is reported on elsewhere in this issue.



The Establishment's Broker

FORD FOUNDATION became involved in school decentralization after the IS 201 boycott. When McGeorge Bundy was asked

Ford had come to feel with others that the school system was not responding to community needs. It had also begun to question the board's notion of superimposed decentralization. Arguing for the concept of organic decentralization, Ford felt that the result of such an approach had to be the strengthened representation of those closest to the learner—parents and teachers.

The community groups, Ford learned in its meetings, wanted something new in the management of public education. They wanted the parents to become trustees of the school, and they wanted the right to hire their own administrator. They wanted, in effect, potency and legitimacy vis-a-vis the board.

The Ford Foundation was willing to give money to support pilot efforts for increased public participation in running the schools, but would not support an expanded program. Ford said it would help the communities get more money. But it maintained that in order to make the effort work on its own terms and thus make it permanent, the existing system had to be permitted to support it as much as possible.

and participate in determining curriculum, contract directly with consultants, and control budget allotments.

The three planning grants totaling $135,000 were promised in May in the hope that they might be implemented within the year; the board gave its approval at the end of June; the public announcements were made July 6. The aim of the planning for which the grants were made is a proposal that will spell out for the board how each community would administer a model school district and what it conceived of as its relationship to the board.

In the Communities

In the first five weeks since the board's announcement the communities have involved themselves with establishing the several layers of a governing structure necessary to begin work. To some degree they have shaped an educational program. The speed with which each group has moved reflects certain political realities in the community. Two Bridges and Ocean Hill have no competing community groups to contend with. IS 201 has several. For at least the next several months the burden of giving flesh to the

The grant earmarked support over the summer for election expenses; training institutes for parents, governing board members, and school-community workers; a teachers institute; medical, psychological, and educational diagnostic services for children; and consultants.

Since mid-July a planning group of approximately 100 parents and teachers has been meeting regularly at IS 201. According to David Spencer, a project spokesman, several subcommittees have been formed on which both teachers and parents work. Andrew Donaldson, a Negro school art supervisor, one of two Negro males on the city's principal list, was hired as planning administrator.

Mr. Spencer said the planning committee expects a first draft of its proposal to be ready around the beginning of September. As of mid-August, when volunteers began to canvass voters for the governing board election, the proposal was still completely fluid.

Mr. Spencer said that tentative agreement had been reached on the makeup of the governing board: ten parents (two from each school) elected by school parents; five com-

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FORD FOUNDATION became involved in school decentralization after the IS 201 boycott. When McGeorge Bundy was asked by the board to form a task force, he sent two aides into East Harlem to assess the community leaders' feelings about joining such a group. The aides came back with the news that there was absolutely no interest to participate on the board's panel and that community school leaders had formed a "People's Board of Education." Mr. Bundy stalled the board and asked his staff—including Mario Fantini— to develop their contacts with the IS 201 negotiating team. Ford and the Harlem leaders held informal meetings throughout the winter and spring, and Mr. Fantini made contacts with a number of community school leaders. The meetings helped give the groups legitimacy and at some point Dr. Donovan began to participate in the discussions.

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The Ford Foundation was willing to give money to support pilot efforts for increased public participation in running the schools, but would not support an expanded program. Ford said it would help the communities get more money. But it maintained that in order to make the effort work on its own terms and thus make it permanent, the existing system had to be permitted to support it as much as possible. In addition, Ford asserted that the communities had to gain the support of other concerned groups— such as Mayor Lindsay's panel studying decentralization, the Human Resources Administration, the State Education Department, the universities, and the education industry.

Ford showed the negotiating teams how this might be done. At the same time it showed the board how the community's demands might be met without the board risking loss of its professional power. Ford got the communities to draft proposals requesting planning support and got the board to agree in principle to the concepts embodied in these proposals: the election of parents, community leaders, and teaching staff to a governing board; the transfer of authority to such a board to select a unit administrator made is a proposal that will spell out for the board how each community would administer a model school district and what it conceived of as its relationship to the board.

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Ford's biggest planning grant, $55,000, was made to the Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle Inc., on behalf of a local governing board which will be elected in mid-September and which will administer a five-school unit (IS 201 and its feeders, PS 24, 99, 68, 133).

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But a UFT representative said the board's composition was still an issue, as were many questions about controlling expenditures and the use of personnel.

TWO BRIDGES Neighborhood Unit (JHS 65, PS 1, 2, 42, and 126) is part of the school district that asked the board to appoint Elliot Shapiro as its district superintendent. In terms of its schools, it is the least conflict-ridden community of the three given planning

funds and the most ethnically diverse. The school population is about 40 per cent Puerto Rican, and 15 per cent Negro. There is also a substantial Chinese population. Some 70 per cent of the children speak Spanish or Chinese. The unit has an established relationship with its local school board (which the other two units lack). There is experience of community involvement in the schools through the use of classrooms by prekindergarten groups, poverty agencies, and adult education. The community, not surprisingly, responded immediately when it was asked to develop a proposal for a grant.

A planning council was set up before school ended in June which will serve as the model for the governing board when the project is implemented. The council includes six community representatives chosen by the membership of Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (funding agent for the $40,000 grant); six parents chosen by the parents associations of the five schools, including one at-large representative; and six teachers chosen by the UFT chapters (including the UFT district chairman, Joseph Laspro, a teacher, who was

where school educators discuss their experiences and answer questions. The parents will presumably become the core of parents councils to be formed in each school, a structure in which parents will be able to question (but not determine) policy in the schools.

Two weeks ago the planning council held the first of several open meetings to discuss their progress. Last Thursday, a first draft of the proposal to be submitted to the board was made available. Its contents will be aired at a second public meeting mid-August. When the proposal is made final, the planning council will set a date for elections.

According to the unit's proposal for planning funds, Two Bridges wants its 19-man governing board to be granted full fiscal authority, the right to hire staff and consultants, and full power in choosing curriculum and setting educational standards.

In addition to an administrator, the board would appoint business managers for each school. It would also regularly make available to the public all statistics concerning the unit, from broken windows to math scores, from teacher turnover

A Community Reconstituted

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville school project is being run at the butt end of Bedford-Stuyvesant where it edges into Brownsville, a poor working-class neighborhood of old apartment houses and single-family homes. Two years ago it did not exist as a community. Being on the periphery of two slum communities is like being the smallest in a family of hungry children. The substance of the poverty programs directed to Bedford-Stuyvesant ran thin by the time it reached Ocean Hill. That is perhaps why the community organized around the schools when a new one opened and another was promised.

The changes that took place to give the community a focus is credited to a young Catholic priest, Rev. John Powis, who with his broken nose resembles Knute Rockne. Last year, in protest against not being represented on the local school board (District 17 takes in Ocean Hill, Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Brownsville but draws its board members, since reorganizing two years ago, only from East Flatbush and Crown Heights), residents of Brownsville and Ocean

the board failed to respond. After four months, Father Powis and Rev. Milton Galamison of the Siloam Presbyterian Church in Bedford-Stuyvesant led a group of community residents in a short-lived insurrection at 110 Livingston Street. A short time later, Ford made contact with the Ocean Hill community through Father Powis.

When the planning grant was made, Father Powis mobilized the community by having nuns out at 8 a.m. ringing doorbells and working a sound truck announcing the "opportunity to vote for representatives to a board that would operate the schools." The response in a community where apathy had been the norm was the registration of some 1,800 parents to vote.

Before the school term ended in June, meetings were held with parents and teachers to establish guidelines for composing a governing board and defining its authority. There was disagreement between teachers and parents on specific details, but agreement on broad principles. Details were left to be worked out during the summer by planning representatives of the parent associations and UFT chapters. Our Lady of Presentation

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When the governing board is constituted, it will also include a principal chosen by supervisory-level people. The community representatives will be chosen in a community-wide election open to all residents of the area over 18 years old.

The unit has a storefront office on Catherine Street. The six teachers put in a 30-hour week; parents and community workers work ten hours weekly. Full planning council meetings are held twice a week. Subcommittees meet once a week. A personnel subcommittee has been soliciting and screening resumes for the job of unit administrator. In addition, 50 parents, ten from each school, selected by their parent associations, are being put through a "community education" program consisting of a series of 15 seminars

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The program would also create six-man parent-teacher councils (two parents, two teachers, two community residents) to meet monthly with the principal in each school to discuss school matters.

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The changes that took place to give the community a focus is credited to a young Catholic priest, Rev. John Powis, who with his broken nose resembles Knute Rockne. Last year, in protest against not being represented on the local school board (District 17 takes in Ocean Hill, Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Brownsville but draws its board members, since reorganizing two years ago, only from East Flatbush and Crown Heights), residents of Brownsville and Ocean Hill founded an independent school board. Out of this group developed a steering committee to open a proposed new school, IS 55, with the community involved in management. The group submitted a proposal to the board in January, but

community by having nuns out at 8 a.m. ringing doorbells and working a sound truck announcing the "opportunity to vote for representatives to a board that would operate the schools." The response in a community where apathy had been the norm was the registration of some 1,800 parents to vote.

Before the school term ended in June, meetings were held with parents and teachers to establish guidelines for composing a governing board and defining its authority. There was disagreement between teachers and parents on specific details, but agreement on broad principles. Details were left to be worked out during the summer by planning representatives of the parent associations and UFT chapters. Our Lady of Presentation Church, the community organization through which Ford made its $44,000 grant, hired the acting principal of a "600" school in Manhattan, Rhody McCoy, as the unit's planning administrator.

Mr. McCoy is almost certain to be the community's choice as administrator of the eight-school unit (JHS, 271, IS 55, PS 73, 155, 87, 137, 144, 178). If he is chosen by the governing board, he will be a severe test of the board's willingness to let the community do what it wants. Mr. McCoy, a Negro, has been the administrator of a public school for eight years. But he has never been given the full title or the salary. Whatever the circumstances surrounding this situation, he appears to be anathema to 110 Livingston Street.

The unit's proposal, completed at the end of July, calls for a 25-man